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Research in many fields of the social and biological sciences indicates that there are ecological, cultural, social, psychological, physiological, and genetic causes of aggression. The agonistic behavior system, which adapts to situations of social conflict, includes several patterns of conduct ranging from overt fighting to complete passivity. In view of the complex causes of and the multiple factors which influence aggression, and theory that postulates a simple solution to ALL problems of aggression is grossly inadequate. Our cultural ideals are not completely consistent with respect to aggression. On the one hand we express the religious and ethical ideal of peaceful and nonviolent behavior, and on the other we emphasize completition and conceive of every major activity in our society as a fight. As long as these cultural ideals are maintained, problems of aggression will be inevitable. Unlike political institutions, which include a mechanism in their organization for making change possible, universities have been set up as autocratic, hierarchical systems that are based on the notion that he who controls finance eventually controls educational policy. This kind of organization, lacking a mechanism for peaceful social change, has caused college students and faculty to use agression as a tool for obtaining certain goals. A rational division of powers and functions within the university is necessary, as well as a new organization by which the system can be changed in some way other than by violent confrontation. (WM)

Section 7
Monday Morning, March 3

UNDERSTANDING AGGRESSION*

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The problem of the causes of destructive and injurious social fighting is very complex. In the few minutes allotted to me I shall be able to cover only the most important principles that have been derived from the scientific study of aggression, and in no case will I be able to present the detailed evidence which lies behind them. I shall therefore present some of the consequences and conclusions that can be derived from these general principles.

The causes of aggression. The causes of aggression are multiple. Research in many different fields of the social and biological sciences indicates that there are ecological, cultural, social, psychological, physiological, and genetic causes of fighting. Factors which influence aggressive behavior include space, food supply, cultural ideals of behavior, social disorganization, learning and early experience, physiological damage to the nervous system, and hereditary differences between the sexes and between individuals. Any realistic theory of the causes of aggression must therefore be a multiple factor theory. Further, no one of these factors is a key cause of aggression whose elimination will take care of all practical problems. Any theory which states that one factor is the cause of aggression is bound to be a gross oversimplification and therefore inadequate. There is no simple solution to all problems of aggression.

If we classify aggressive behavior on the basis of the causal factors involved, the result is several different kinds of aggression. Even the underlying emotional and physiological mechanisms may be different. In particular, group and individual aggressive behavior have vastly different motivational bases. One cannot, therefore, extend findings concerning the causes of individual aggression to the more complex phenomena of warfare, and vice versa. Each case of aggressive behavior must be examined in its own context and the particular combination of causes of the behavior determined accordingly. Even within the general classes of group and individual aggression there are many different causes.

Aggression is part of a larger behavioral system. Overt fighting is only one expression of the agonistic behavior system, which includes the various patterns of behavior which may be used to adapt to a situation of social conflict. Besides aggression in the strict sense of an unprovoked attack, there are the alternate patterns of defensive fighting, threats, avoidance, escape, defensive threats, various kinds of vocalization, and complete passivity. In human beings any of these patterns of behavior may also be expressed in a completely imaginary form. We can conclude that aggression is not inevitable outcome of social conflict. In fact, other forms of agonistic behavior may be much more useful under particular situations.

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A general theory of aggression. Social fighting has evolved as a primary adaptation for avoiding injury. Almost all species of animals show some defensive reaction to an attack by a predator, and from this it is a short step to defensive behavior which protects against accidental or purposeful injury by a species mate. Social fighting may take on a variety of other functions in various species of animals, but in general there is a tendency for it to evolve into forms in which the chance of serious injury or death is minimized. Among most nonhuman animals, destructive social fighting only occurs in the event of a serious breakdown of social organization.

The simplest and most general adaptive function of fighting is to drive away the species mate that causes pain or injury, and to keep him at a distance. By extension, any unpleasant sensation or emotion that seems to be caused by a neighbor may be reacted to in the same way. The response will be the same whether or not the association of the neighbor and the unpleasant emotion are purely accidental. In the case of two rats that are standing on an electrified grid and are fairly close together, turning on the current will cause each rat to react as if the other had bitten him, and produce defensive fighting. Similarly, children that are hungry frequently fall to fighting as if the other children in the group had caused the painful sensation of hunger. Alternate human reactions to this sort of situation are to run away or to merely hate the individual who appears to be the cause of the unpleasant sensation or emotion.

This general agonistic reaction to unpleasant sensations provides a relatively simple emotional and behavioral mechanism which can be affected by many, if not all, of the various causes of aggressive behavior. Whatever factor sets off the mechanism, the result is much the same, an attempt to drive away the person who is assumed to be the cause, or some other form of agonistic behavior ranging from avoidance to expression of feelings of hostility. However, even this general mechanism does not cover all of the ways in which aggression can be produced.

Aggression as a tool. Since social fighting is adaptive behavior, it can be thought of as a tool for obtaining certain objects, primarily the removal of certain persons causing unpleasant sensations or emotions. Carried to its ultimate extreme, removal can be made permanent by killing the offending individual. Human beings, being as intelligent as they are, have developed various other ways in which this tool can be used. One of these is to punish various kinds of undesirable activities, particularly in children, and another has been to use it as a motivation for producing work in the case of slavery. Because the slave is motivated to run away or revolt by such treatment, this sort of motivation has long since been abandoned as being inefficient.

Aggression as it is used in warfare has much more general uses as a tool. In any conflict, an organized group is always stronger than an individual, and in conflicts between groups the better organized group with the better tools for aggression usually wins. Therefore, under certain conditions, organized fighting and warfare can be used for acquiring certain desirable material gains, such as land, slaves, food, and various forms of loot. It can even be used to convert individuals to a new religion or to stamp out heresy, as the older wars of religion attest.

On an individual basis, robbery by violence and rape are examples of the use of aggression as a tool. In these cases, the motivational bases of aggression are very different from those of its primary biologically adaptive function described above.

The control of aggression. One general method for the control of destructive violence is to organize life in such a way that aggression as a tool will not work,

or even appear that it might work. This is particularly difficult in the case of war, and we must look forward to developing more effective forms of international organization. On the individual level, punishment, and particularly physical punishment, is not the answer, as pain itself is a primary stimulus for fighting. The most effective methods of controlling aggressive behavior are the formation of positive habits of constructive and cooperative behavior through reward training. In this way individuals are both too busy to fight and form habits of not fighting. Where there is a danger of violence, restraint is more effective than punishment. When an individual attempts to use aggression as a tool, the most effective method of control is to ensure that his first attempt promptly ends in failure, and this is the prime function of a good police force.

Understanding aggression in the universities. In the first place, relatively little overt aggression occurs anywhere in our society. Because it does occur so infrequently, we have no reliable estimates as to the actual amount of time spent in hostile behavior, but it would undoubtedly be a very small fraction of one percent of the total time of the average individual. We become disturbed because the occurrence of violent behavior is not completely zero, as some of our cultural ideas would dictate, and because of the disastrous consequences of certain kinds of violent behavior.

Our cultural ideals are not completely consistent with respect to aggression. On the one hand we express the religious and ethical ideal of peaceful and non-violent behavior. On the other hand we emphasize competition and conceive of every major activity in our society as a fight. Government is a fight between two political parties, legal procedures have their historical origins in trial by combat, religion is conceived as a fight between good and evil, marriage as a contest for supremacy between husband and wife, and education as a fight between pupil and teacher. As long as we maintain these cultural ideals, we are inevitably going to have problems of aggression. Fighting will always be the tool of last resort in these competitive situations, and sometimes not even the last resort. We have a tendency to grant rights only to those persons who stand up and fight for them in either a symbolic or literal fashion. At the present time, college students and professors are using limited and sometimes not so limited forms of aggression as a tool for obtaining certain goals. These goals are not always clear and vary a great deal in their importance.

The basic cause of the expression of aggressiveness in the universities is that academic institutions do not include in their organization any mechanism for peaceful social change. Our political institutions include a mechanism for amending the Constitution, albeit by slow and difficult means, but everything in our academic organization is set up to prevent change. Our universities in the past were set up as autocratic hierarchical systems with trustees at the top (and sometimes in the case of state universities the legislature above them), next the president, next the administrators, then the faculty (and within the faculty various ranks of professors), and finally, at the very bottom, the students. This hierarchy is based on the notion that he who controls finance eventually controls educational policy. As everyone knows, this has worked out badly and inefficiently in practice, and a change is long overdue. What we need is a rational division of powers and functions within the university and, above all, we need to set up a new organization by which the system can be changed in some other way than by violent confrontation.

Social change. Finally, aggression is part of a dynamic system of cultural and social organization of behavior which develops anew in each generation. We therefore cannot hope to find a final static solution to the problem. We do know that men can either develop into creative, cooperative, and self-sacrificing individuals or alternately into impersonal engines of hate and destruction. We also

know a great many of the causes and mechanisms by which their development is turned in either direction. The social changes of today will determine what will happen to the next generation. We are beginning to accumulate enough knowledge so that we can take a long range view of human behavior and predict the practical consequences of today's social change or the behavior of our children and our children's children.

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